

JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

CHRISTIAN EXISTENCE
IN A WORLD OF
INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

TOWARDS A WORLD THEOLOGY: AN INTERRELIGIOUS
APPROACH TO THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

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BOOK REVIEW

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JEEVADHARA

The Meeting of Religions

**CHRISTIAN EXISTENCE
IN A WORLD OF
INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

Editor :

John B. Chethimattam

Associate Editor:

Thomas Kochumuttom

Theology Centre

Kottayam - 686 017

Kerala, India

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Editorial

The past half a century has been one of intense interaction among religions of the world. Several World Religions like Hinduism and Buddhism which were almost unknown outside their geographic territories, confronted world consciousness and questioned traditional beliefs and assumptions of Christendom. Vast numbers lost faith in Christianity and went after new religious movements like the Harekrishna cult and the Unification Church of Sung Yang Moon, not to speak of traditional Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism, and even Islam which seems to hold a certain fascination for disaffected Black American Christians. On the other hand, religion itself does not have the influence it once wielded over the lives of people. From the experience of World Marxism people have learned that human morality and a sound value system need not necessarily depend upon the structures of established religion. Institutional religion and its manifold structures have lost their privileged position and value in the eyes of people. The functionaries of religion like priests, ministers and rabbis have gone down on the scale of social prestige and are today treated on a par with functionaries of other social services like druggists and clerks.

But religion itself has not suffered any serious set back in the lives of people. Religious problems like the source and ultimate meaning of human life, existence of a divine reality, the place and meaning of human suffering especially of the innocent, the question of survival after death and the place and role of the human body in man's total salvation, continue to agitate the minds of people and they earnestly look for convincing answers to them. Besides, religion is one of the most important mediating structures in society standing between the individual and private institutions like the family and the local club, on the one hand, and the overpowering and alienating establishments like the State and big corporations on the other. In meeting the problems of man today only religion can deal with them from a certain depth so as to have the total life of man in view in solving the passing temporal problems.

In this continuing importance of religious values and declining popularity of organized religion the Church is faced with a difficult task and asking itself how best it can fulfil its Christ-given mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples. In fact, it is greatly tempted to adopt two courses of approach in the modern world, both of which are self-defeating and hence objectionable. The spokesmen for Christian faith are inclined today to write off the great majority of the people as a post-Christian generation on which faith will have very little impact. Hence they would advise the Church to withdraw into her little sanctuary and concentrate on the small minority of traditionalist believers, the microscopic minority of Church-going Christians. But a Church that does not have salvation of all men in view in its preaching will not be truly Catholic and will not be the Church of Christ. The other temptation is to forget Christ, the Incarnation, the Resurrection and other apparently inconvenient points of Christian faith and water it down to a humanistic religion that places the major emphasis on the worldly development of man. A Church that denies or ignores the central role of Christ in human history, the importance of his Resurrection for the salvation of all humanity and even the centrality of the experience of the Triune God in Christ, does not have anything specific or unique to communicate to the world today, and should rather stop calling itself Christian. Nor can the Church continue to carry on business as usual, treating Christian Revelation as the exclusive prerogative of Christians explaining it in a jargon intelligible to them alone, ignoring the religious problems and needs of the rest four-fifths of humanity. The Church is bound to preach the Gospel to all peoples and show how the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ are relevant and important to the basic problems and concerns of the followers of all religions.

This issue of *Jeevadhara* concentrates on this paradoxical Christian existence in today's world where the problems and concerns of all religions seem to converge. In the first article my aim is to show how the traditional exclusivistic pattern of Christian theologizing can be broken and how the fundamental problems of faith shared by the majority of religions, divine revelation, existence of God, problem of bondage and salvation, the personality of the Saviour, one's personal encounter with God and fellowship in the believing community can be discussed in such a

way as to respond to the religious concerns of all traditions without however denying the unique contribution of Christianity. Robert C. Neville, an ordained Methodist minister, professor of religious studies and Dean at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, shows in his article that even today Christian missionary work has not lost its relevance or value. Even though today the centre of gravity has shifted from the religious to the secular, even the most profane problems of man can be dealt with only from a certain spiritual depth. Wayne Teasdale's article shows how mystical experience has a dynamic and unifying role in bringing religions together in facing the problems of man today. These papers are not expected to be exhaustive in any way, but intended to initiate a new way of theologizing that is of paramount importance in our pluralistic age.

Dharmaram College,
Bangalore

John B. Chethimattam

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Towards a World Theology: an Interreligious Approach to Theological Issues

The New Interreligious Mood

Today World Religions have entered a new era of common understanding and cooperation in their search for the salvation of humanity. They are no longer viewed upon as competing ideologies demanding the total allegiance of the same people. Taking their origin and developing in different historical contexts and socio-cultural and political situations they are considered distinct systems and traditions that represent varying ways of faith and provide solutions to the basic problems of humanity such as the origin, nature and meaning of human existence and of human society, reasons and roots of suffering, source of evil in the world and the question of one's survival after the tragedy of death. In the euphoria of human freedom claimed after the end of World War II there emerged a new attitude of sharing and cooperation in the relationship among religions in contrast to the exclusivism and antagonism that characterised their outlook towards each other in the earlier period.

This new willingness to enter into dialogue with each other even from the part of religions that claimed direct revelations from God is owing to a number of religious factors that have come to the full awareness of humanity only in recent times. First of all, all have come to recognize that though religion deals with the divine reality it is very much a human phenomenon, the way human beings understand God and express that understanding in words, gestures, rituals and traditions. Even though God is said to communicate himself directly in Revelation through words and deeds, still that communication is expressed and transmitted in human words, narratives and events that need to be interpreted so that one may come to the rational realization that God is actually and directly present in those words, stories and events. Although the disciples of Christ encountered the Son of God in bodily form, they needed to use their reason and interpret their experience in

order to arrive at the conclusion that it was not an ordinary Jewish Rabbi, but really the Son of God that they encountered in Jesus of Nazareth. Even if we had today a tape-recording of the sermons of Jesus or a videotape of his working of a miracle that by itself need not convince us that Jesus is really the Son of God; the evidence has to be analyzed and interpreted.

A second discovery that radically altered the traditional attitudes among religions is the place and role of the individual knowing subject in the perception even of the most clear and obvious objective truths of religion. The principle on which various religions based their programmes of persecution against members of other religions—hardly there is any religion on the face of the earth which did not practise persecution of other religionists at one time or other — was that error has no right. Beliefs and traditions contrary to what one in all sincerity of faith accepted as true had to be false. Hence one could in no way tolerate them without compromising one's own faith. This is the reason why religious authorities with the best of intentions justified and authorised the burning of heretics and witches.

But belief systems and traditions have no value unless accepted by conscious beings; and rational beings cannot accept ideas and systems except under the aspects of truth and good. No one can accept evil or falsehood for its own sake. Any error lives in the minds of those who accept it on account of the element of truth trapped in it. Hence the effective way of fighting error is not burning people who in good faith follow it, but rather recognizing and thus liberating the truth factor hidden in the particular erroneous system, at the same time as rejecting the falsehood and thereby liberating the human beings caught in the limitations of the particular truth. Even the most perfect religion is not absolute truth, but is characterised by various limitations, social, cultural, political and the like, and therefore needs liberation in interaction with other truth systems. Interreligious dialogue, therefore, even for the most perfect of religions is not a luxury but a need lest it should remain a prisoner to its own limitations.

But the most important reason for interreligious cooperation is the universality of religious problems and of the religious truths. If there is a God, there is a God also for the atheist, and if there

God is really triune, the divine reality is a Trinity also for the Unitarians. One's particular preferences and prejudices and immediate concerns cannot affect the objective state of affairs. All claims of superiority and position of privilege made by one religion over the others often stem from national pride and attempts at economic, political and cultural domination of one group over others. One of the first discoveries Christianity had to make before it could launch its mission to evangelize the world is expressed in the words of St. Peter at Caesarea addressing the Gentile Cornelius and his companions: "I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality. Rather, the man of any nation who fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to him." (Acts, 10:34-35) One comes to the idea of God in searching for the meaning of one's own life, the source of existence, ultimate support in all one's need and the final hope of one's survival after death. That God, who is evidently a conscious being that brought man into existence cannot be imagined to be silent. He can be expected to disclose to man in various ways details concerning His own divine reality, the nature and source of man's problems like sin and suffering, the way to resolve them, and what man has to do in order to realize his own goal in life and attain the final happiness destined for him.

The fact that the Creator does not remain simply outside his creation but is immanent in it and enters into intimate communion with his own creatures is a matter of special interest to all religions. All religions, even those which do not deal with a personal God, in one way or other discuss the question of ultimate meaning of reality, the existence and nature of the divine, divine revelation and incarnation, the questions of human sin and suffering, and salvation and the reconstitution of the authentic human family. Today no religious tradition can formulate its faith and scheme of practice in isolation from other systems and traditions. In the past too this interaction existed, but with the difference that different religious traditions developed and modified themselves in reaction and opposition to other religions. Today they have to learn from each other. No religion can deal with other systems on an attitude of confrontation, treating them as if they were pure error, creations of the devil, or at best simply inadequate human attempts to arrive at the incomprehensible reality of the Transcendent. Even the condescending statement often found in official

documents of the Church that other religions and their religious texts contained "seeds of the Word" is a contradiction in terms. The Word of God if it is truly divine cannot be taken piecemeal. If truly "seeds of the Word" are recognized there the Word of God himself is there. Religions should be considered like any other field of human endeavour, say science, technology, art and philosophy, as parallel efforts of the human race, assisted by Divine Providence to find adequate solutions for the deepest problems of man.

i. Divine Revelation

The starting point of all theology is the divine self-disclosure to man. With any amount of efforts from the side of man God remains incomprehensible. Even though through reasoning from the nature of created things one can arrive at the existence of a Creator and deduce certain divine characteristics like infinity and intellectuality, these remain human projections. In this way we know more what God is not than what He actually is. God has no aspects or parts and hence cannot be known piecemeal.

So some religions like Buddhism and Jainism would deny the usefulness of all inquiry into God. According to them religions should place the emphasis on liberating man from his present sickness of ignorance, passion, attachment to material things and the like. Revelation, therefore, for them is essentially the faithful handing down of religious wisdom tracing its origin to the illumination received by eminent leaders like Siddhartha Gautama Buddha or Vardhamana Mahavira. Here the relevant question, as far as man is concerned is, what purpose the "revealed doctrine" serves in liberating humanity from its present bondage.

But most religions would deny that the divine reality is the Great Unknown. For human beings who constantly experience their sinfulness, limitation and need for help, God is paradoxically the best known ground of existence, and at the same time the most profound and incomprehensible mystery. In and through every finite thing, even a blade of grass or a drop of dew, one is encountering the one Author of all things, the beginningless Beginning, the independent First Cause of all activity, the subsistent Existence, pure and infinite Good, the governing and directing Intelligence and

the Source of all beauty and order in the universe. We get another glimpse of the same divine reality through the reports of theophanies and miraculous happenings in which people could discern an intervention from outside the ordinary course of nature, since certain basic laws of nature got suspended for a moment or certain things achieved results far beyond their normal competence. More marked is the experience of the divine presence in the providential course of the history of peoples and nations that seem to indicate an overarching plan and design, a higher purpose and superior goal than that of the natural and normal course of human events. This is said to be the salvific meaning of history that is worked out in, through and some times even against the profane meaning of history.

Perhaps the most radical difference in the perception of religious experience between the Judeo-Christian tradition and the other religions is history. In these traditions the divine is intuited by the individual as the transcendental meaning of one's existence, as if in flash in a moment which seems to transcend time. The religious community arises as the fellowship of those who have such time-arresting experience of the Transcendent. On the other hand for the Judeo-Christian tradition the community is first created by a special call from God gathering up and constituting a hardnecked and unsuspecting group into a "Chosen People", the "People of God" with a special mission towards the rest of humanity. Experience of God occurs for them in the context of that community and in the providential course of its history. For Israel the legend of its miraculous liberation from the slavery of Egypt and the story of its freedom from the long captivity of Babylon become a symbol not only of the origin of the universe as a creative liberation from the primeval chaos, but also of the continuing presence of Yahweh in the midst of "His" people guiding its destinies and leading it to the liberation of all humanity. For Christianity all history before Christ leads up to the "Christ event", the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ, and the history after Christ is a preparation of the world for his second coming at the end of the world. In the miraculous event of the raising of Christ from the dead is contained as if in miniature the overarching plan of God for the salvation of all humanity and also the ever continuing presence of God in the world as the Lord of history.

For Hinduism, on the other hand, any true Revelation of God can be received only through an intuitive experience. Every other means of right knowledge like inference, analogy and even Scripture presents the divine in forms and idioms of man's daily experience. No other form can really present God who transcends all forms and images. Hence they can only dispose and prepare a mind and lead it up to the intuitive experience which is intimately personal. In the same way, one who has attained that intuitive experience cannot communicate it to others directly but can only help them through indirect means to dispose themselves to receive the same experience. Hence the scope and goal of all religion is the attainment of the direct and intuitive self-disclosure of the divine reality, which by its very nature implies a certain identity between the knower and the known. The Mundaka Upanishad neatly states the fact: the knower of Brahman becomes even Brahman. All divine revelation implies an effective divinization of the recipient.

The Christian concept of revelation brings in another dimension: The scope of divine revelation is not merely to provide us with some information on the divinity, to construct an ontology of God, but rather to reveal man to man himself with God as the horizon of the full meaning of his life. In this way Jesus Christ, fully man and fully God at the same time in the unity of a single divine personality is the fullness of divine revelation since he reveals man to man himself. He shows how the human consciousness is fully open to the divine, and at the same time also totally committed to the salvation of all humanity in the sacrifice of the Cross. Further what fully reveals God to humanity in Jesus Christ is the divine personality of Christ, the Son of God. What the disciples experienced in Jesus especially the Risen Lord, was not a mere humanity, nor mere divine power and activity, but the one who is Son of God and son of man at the same time, the Messiah, the one mediator between God and humanity. In Christ the human race met with the Godhead in bodily form. Christ's personality is in a way transparent since the Son as Son cannot be understood without encountering the Father and that too under the guidance of the Spirit given by Christ.

1. The Problem of God

The experience of the self-disclosure of God in whatever form naturally leads one to the problem of the divine reality. God, the ultimate meaning of human existence, Creator and final goal of all things, should naturally be the one unifying principle of all religions and peoples. But unfortunately this was not always the case. The history of humanity bears witness to the numerous religious wars that split the human race into opposing camps brought nation against nation and religion against religion. One of the basic reasons for these religious wars was that the specific approaches to God followed by particular traditions were very much dictated by the socio-political concerns of those peoples. To counteract the bad effects generated by such conflicts and divergent concerns one has to emphasize the complementarity of the different approaches to God, the ultimate meaning of human life.

For the Greeks caught up in the constant conflicts among city states and wars with the Persians and other world powers the search for the ultimate meaning of existence focussed on what was the really real in a world of appearance, the source of stability in a universe of flux. The main philosophical principle was stated by Parmenides when he said, "What is and can be thought of is Being, and non-being is not." Plato defined this ultimate Being, the form of all forms as the Good, the sun of the intellectual world, since from it everything derived its goodness and intelligibility. For Aristotle this absolute reality was the Immovable Mover, Thought thinking itself, which moved all things not by physical force but as the object of their knowledge and love. Plotinus identified this supreme Good and the Immovable Mover with the One which produced all things through the *Nous*, the storehouse of all ideas; and the Medieval Scholastics discovered in this Greek idea of the Absolute the best metaphysical definition of God, the Creator of all things, who was also by that very reason their final end. For He is the infinite Good and supreme intelligible to which all beings tend through their proper activities, especially human beings through their knowledge and will. St. Augustine's statement: "O Lord you created us for you and our heart is restless until it rests in you" indicates the

place of God as the final goal of human life. Similarly Aquinas formulates its intellectualist version: "Our intellect in knowing anything tends to the infinite. A sign of this is that given any finite quantity our intellect can think of something greater. This inclination of the intellect to the infinite would be in vain unless there were some infinite thing. So there is something infinite which we call God."

The search for God in the East, on the other hand, was prompted by the inner needs of man, his experience of suffering and the desire to find its roots and ultimate solution. Naturally the root of suffering was located in the radical ignorance of one's true self and the confusion between the immutable spiritual self and the material principle of evolution and individuality. The time-space bound and evolving material aspect of life naturally postulates not only an immediate principle of matter but also a transcendent spiritual self: Anything structured and composed of several parts, argues the Samkhyakarika, is for the sake of the unstructured and simple spiritual self, which is the true ground, goal and directive principle. So the changing material existence of man points to the individual spiritual self as its authentic and responsible subject. But the existence of many individual selves is an indication of the limited character of their existence and consciousness, and so demands an ultimate Self of all, pure, infinite and immutable consciousness, subsisting by itself. This is the Hindu view of the Absolute Reality, Atman-Brahman, which identifies in itself the radically distinct dimensions of being, consciousness and bliss.

The nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes of the Middle East moving up and down what is known as the fertile crescent constituted by the Nile and Euphrates and Tigris valleys connected by the Palestinian coast, looked on God as some one a powerful leader who could protect his people from the dangers of desert life. Each clan and tribe had its own special God. Israel addressed its God as Yahweh, who described himself to Moses as "I am Who Am", the one who really is, or more literally one who is faithful to himself, namely to the promise he made to his people. This powerful Lord who owes allegiance and fidelity to no one except himself is conceived as one who is "wholly Other", tota-

transcendent over all the limitations and vicissitudes of human existence and yet ever present in the midst of his people.

These different conceptions of God are in no way contradictory but complete each other. This becomes evident when we look at the different concepts of salvation entertained by different peoples. God is primarily postulated as the Saviour of his people.

III. The Problem of Salvation

The most crucial and fundamental issue in religious experience is the meaning of God for humanity, His role in human salvation. The problem of salvation implies two things, first that the finite rational beings realize their creatureliness and dependence on the Supreme Being, and second that they have a sense of possibility of sharing in the immutable happiness and intimate bliss of the Deity. This hope of attaining absolute truth and changeless bliss comes basically from the nature of the rational activities of knowledge and love. Our intellect as the faculty of truth tends to all truth and in concrete to the one subsistent, infinite Truth and our will to all good, which in concrete is the infinite and subsistent Good. Hence man by nature is a seeker of God.

But the infinite truth and good cannot be directly attained by the rational faculties of man, dependent as they are on the sensitive faculties in the present state of bodily existence. On the other hand, the very nature of creation requires that beings which proceed from God the Creator should in some manner finally return to him, and the first cause of things should be also their last end. This is expressed by the statement that everything seeks God and that everything tends to become more and more similar to God. In fact the tendency and activity of every being is to attain some good, in the line of its final end. If it is granted that God is all good and the source of all good it becomes obvious that, whether they know it or not, want it or not, their natural tendency is a movement towards that supreme Good. Hence in a sense all love is symbolic and mystical: since it is the good as such that all love, implicitly that love is the weight of one's being inclining it to the source and goal of all beings, God. One loves even oneself only to the extent one sees

oneself as good, and for that matter the good immediately present to oneself. If at the end of life one is to discover that owing to one's selfishness one has lost the eternal and real good what will result consequently is a total hatred of oneself, which is the essence of final damnation.

This natural condition of being limited in the present condition to the immediate and finite goals of one's own existence and the field of one's immediate experience can be viewed in different ways by philosophers and theologians. The finite objects and ends can very well be seen as means and intermediary goals in the line of one's movement towards the final goal. But the different faculties of man and the complex and often contradictory nature of the objects sought by the different faculties of man create a certain confusion in the total orientation of man towards his final end. This comes from the very nature of the bodily existence. Though the human soul as a rational spirit intrinsically surpasses the limitations of matter, time and space, still, even the most sublime, universal and transcendent ideas and principles have to be learned and derived by reason from sense experience which is intrinsically dependent on bodily organs and the external environment. What is immediately presented to the senses and to the sensitive appetite create a deeper impression and greater appeal than what reason by calm consideration discovers to be the right order of things in the total context of human rational life especially in one's life with other fellow human beings. These ideas and principles appear remote out in the future somewhere and not actually relevant to the present situation. Hence it takes a great deal of education, training and self-discipline for human beings to impose effectively the dictates of reason and propriety on the details of daily life.

Philosophically speaking this condition of the rational being subordinated to the condition of time-space bound material existence can be said to be abnormal, a real state of bondage, and may be characterised as a fall from the ideal state of the spirit. The Samkhya-Yoga philosophy which analyzes the problem of human suffering purely from the principles of reason without appealing to Vedic lore and mythology locates the source of ignorance and instability in the material principle, Prakrti with its triple gunas.

or functions of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*; reflection, action and imitation. The true spiritual selfhood, on the other hand, is rooted in the Purusha, the pure spirit, which is consciousness shining like a lamp by itself. But the present state of union of Purusha and Prakrti is for the benefit of both, like the association of the blind and the lame. Matter, though the principle of change and evolution, lacks consciousness and is blind, and has, therefore, to receive its knowledge, direction and purpose in some mysterious manner from Purusha. Purusha, on the other hand, as pure light lacks self-consciousness and is unable to act by itself like a lame person. The evolutions of Prakrti under the impulse of consciousness received from the spirit turns the latter's attention back to itself and thus enables it to attain self-realization or "*kaivalya*", isolation from matter. Hence the present state is one of fall, namely the dissipation of consciousness in the evolutions of the mind: Spirit follows the mode of existence and activity of matter. Instead, it should come back to its own proper mode of existence, and matter should be made subordinate to the spirit.

Buddhism has a more radical view of bondage as a situation of suffering. What we consider life and happiness is actually a sickness, a product of our craving coming out of ignorance and its consequences of inborn tendencies, senses, sense objects, experience, forming a sort of chain along with birth, old age and death. Hence life has no absolute value, but only a relative reality as that of a mirage, bubble, shadow, illusion or dream. Since sickness is something abnormal, our life is like time spent in a hospital. One's primary aim in a hospital is not to stay there permanently and make one's life there as comfortable as possible, but rather to get rid of the sickness and come out of the hospital as soon as possible. Hence the purpose of religion is not the attainment of anything positive like salvation, happiness and union with God, since these too would be only part of our illusory existence, a sort of delirium in our sickness. Nirvana, or blowing out of the fire of our bondage is the main aim. What is beyond Nirvana can in no way be understood or conceived through means and patterns that we use to understand life. Even nirvana is part of *samsara*, the transmigratory existence, even it be thought of as its elimination.

Sankara's Advaita philosophy takes up where Buddhism left off: It shows that there is a bridge between this world of bondage

and the life beyond in the phenomenon of consciousness, which has a quality that transcends matter and bodily existence. For Sankara the heart of bondage is in the confusion that exists in what we consider normal consciousness: Consciousness is pure light shining by itself that must naturally lead us to a realization of our inmost self, the infinite, immutable consciousness that is God. But our normal conscious activity based on the operation of our senses superimposes our selfhood or subjectivity on the field of the object as is clear in expressions like "my body" and "my money" and characteristics of the object world on the field of the subject as when we say "I am fat", "I suffer" and the like. Hence the real way of salvation is a reorientation of our consciousness back to its centre in the true Self of God. It cannot, however, be accomplished by the various means available to us like ritual, reasoning, Scripture, meditation and instruction by an enlightened teacher, which all can only prepare the ground. The realization of God, which is the light of God shining by itself, has to happen by itself. In this too Advaita tradition is in agreement with the Samkhya-Yoga philosophies and the implicit philosophy of Buddhism.

But the Bhakti or devotional traditions including those of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, shift the focus to another aspect of the problem of bondage and salvation. The human being bound in ignorance and suffering is some one, a responsible person, and God whom one has to see as one's true centre and self is also a personal being. How finite so ever a human being is, before God he stands like a child who has received all that he is and all that he has from the Father, and is also capable of surrendering himself completely to another. The human bondage in this perspective is a turning away from God, one's Lord and Master, to the material world in search of fun and pleasure. It implies in the conscious human being two radical sins, of disobedience and pride. The child of God in flagrant disobedience refuses to submit to the laws laid down by its Father, and in pride constitutes itself as pseudo-absolute over against God claiming equality with Him, forming itself as a sort of centre for beings around it, using them at will for its own pleasure. Naturally when this wayward child of God seeks to surround itself with things of this world, it becomes dependent on them, exposed not only to pleasurable experiences but also to pain and suffering owing to their conflicts, loss or absence. Once it has wilfully alienated itself from its Lord and

Master and made itself God's enemy, it cannot by itself restore the lost friendship. Only the offended Father can take the initiative to grant it pardon and restore the friendship. Besides, friendship with God implies a share in divine life and only God can communicate divine life.

This personalist view of sin and salvation is most dramatically presented in the Biblical legend of the Garden of Eden: Adam and Eve who were created by God and placed by Him in the garden of delights, under the temptation of satan eat the forbidden fruit in order to become like God. So they are punished and expelled from Paradise. Through the sin of Adam, the first parent, the whole humanity lost its friendship with God. But God when He expelled Adam and Eve from Paradise and condemned all humanity to toil, suffering and death, also promised them a future saviour, a child of the human race who will bring salvation to all humanity. But here the emphasis is not on the particular event of the fall, which is evidently mythological, but on the need for humanity to restore the divine friendship through a divine initiative, a Messiah a mediator between God and human race.

iv. The Personality of the Saviour

The need of a divine initiative to restore humanity's friendship with God shifts the emphasis from the problem of salvation to the personality of the Saviour. When bondage is conceived as ignorance, illusion and confusion about one's own real self, as in Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, the Saviour is thought of as a Guru, a teacher, who has himself attained enlightenment about his true self as centred in God. As Sankara states, for the disciple, the Guru is God himself in bodily form, presenting a sort of focus to gather together his dissipated powers to bring them back to concentrate on his true self. Once the disciple has achieved the control of his passions and concentration of his energies in this divine focus outside, the Guru can utter the liberating statement: *Tattvamasi* - Your real Self is the Supreme residing in the cave of your own heart. Brahamabandhab Upadhyaya rightly points out in this context that to be a Guru in the real sense one has to be at the same time a true historical human being and also truly divine, both of which have been realized only in one person in history, Jesus of Nazareth.

Buddhism finds the saviour figure in Siddhartha Gautama Buddha Sakya-muni, who attaining liberation became the model and prototype of all who wish to reach liberation. Buddha is what every one else has to become. Later Mahayana Buddhism tried to indicate the different aspects of this salvific experience by 'distinguishing the three bodies of Buddha, the *sambhogakaya* or enjoyment body which Buddha has in common with every other being, pointing to the *nirmanakaya* or creative body and the *Dharmakaya* which is the absolute ideal approximating to the divine. The ideal of human life is to liberate itself from the enjoyment body and attain the purity and tranquillity of the Dharma body.

Hinduism has generally located liberation between two ideal poles, the pole of the divine absolute, Atman-Brahman and the pole of the highest human perfection represented by the different Avatars and Istadevatas which people worship. Atman which is also Brahman is attained as one's own ultimate Self by an intimate and intuitive realization, while the Istadevata or the Avatar presents an ideal of self-perfection for a particular individual or even for a whole age. The immutable divine reality as the ground of all existence, and ideal of human perfection reaching up to heaven seem to be the two fundamental dimensions of religious experience on which salvation in most religions is to be fixed. Even in Islam the rule of Allah in human life and the unique role of the Prophet Mohammed in mediating God's law to people are two fundamental requisites of salvation. In Sikhism the place of the Avatar and the Prophet is taken by the Guru starting with Guru Nanak and in the end becoming the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Writ.

For Christianity salvation for all humanity is centered in the personality of the Son of God become man, Jesus Christ, and what happened in and through him, namely his death and resurrection. This is briefly stated in St. John's Gospel in the sacerdotal prayer of Jesus: "Eternal life is this: to know you the only true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ." (Jn 17:3). The Father presents the transcendent and absolute point of religious experience while Jesus Christ is the highest ideal of human perfection. We can find from the New Testament that in preaching the Gospel of salvation the disciples were not very much pre-occupied with the divinity of Jesus Christ. There are hardly three

or four clear and direct statements about Christ's divinity in the whole New Testament. Not that the disciples were not aware that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, but that it was not the primary focus of their Gospel. From the experience of the Resurrection of Christ the disciples came to the realization that Jesus with whom they lived for three years and whose preaching and miracles they had witnessed was not an ordinary Rabbi, but the Messiah, the Saviour. The missionary discourses of the Acts of the Apostles show a standard way of presenting the message of salvation: God of our fathers, the God of the Old Testament promised us salvation in fulfilment of which he sent his chosen one, Jesus Christ. But you Jews crucified him. But God was not to be thwarted in his plan. He has raised Jesus from the dead and made him Son and Saviour, the one judge over all humanity, the centre of a new order of things. Death of Jesus was the crime of the Jews, his resurrection was God's salvific work for all mankind.

But when the Apostles come to the Greek world and encounter the saviour figures of the Mystery Cults, the vegetation deities that die in winter and come back to life in the spring, they realize the expiatory and redemptive character of Christ's acceptance of his death as a true sacrifice. "All men have sinned", preaches St. Paul, "and are deprived of the glory of God. All men are now undeservingly justified by the gift of God, through the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus. Through his blood, God made him the means of expiation for all who believe. He did so to manifest his own justice, for the sake of remitting sins committed in the past so that he might be just and justify those who believe in Jesus." (Rom. 3:24-26). Similarly St. Peter tells his faithful: "Realize that you were delivered from the futile way of life your fathers handed on to you, not by any diminishable sum of silver or gold, but by Christ's blood beyond all price, the blood of a spotless, unblemished lamb." (1 Pet. 1: 18-19)

What St. Paul does is to universalize the Gospel: The Greeks rightly emphasized the need of mediators or intermediary beings to bridge the immense gulf between the world of material beings to which humanity belonged and the absolute divine Reality. But the intermediaries proposed by the Greeks, namely the Stoics, the

Middle Platonists and Gnostics would not serve the purpose since they were not truly divine, and often not truly human either. In contrast, Christ who achieved the reconciliation between God and humanity "in his mortal body by dying" (Col. 1: 22) is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creatures, in whom, through whom, and for whom everything in heaven and on earth including the angels was created (Col. 1: 15-16). Only the Son of God who is truly God and who took a real human nature in the historical Jesus is the one true mediator between God and humanity. Hence God who in past times spoke in fragmentary and varied ways to our fathers through the prophets, in this final age has spoken to us through his Son (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus Christ is the Word of God and truly God (Jn 1:1). Hence St. Thomas the Apostle confesses his faith in the Risen Lord by acknowledging his divinity: "My Lord and my God." (Jn.20:28)

The unique Christian contribution to the understanding of human salvation is the particular emphasis on the fact that the human race is a single organism, one time-bound entity that seeks to return to the Creator in the most intimate union. This goal is realizable on a purely natural plane when each thing attains the perfection of its nature. But the conscious human being is called to a deeper intimacy in the bosom of the divinity. For a time-bound entity keeping the integrity of its nature this intimate encounter with the Godhead can be realized only if the divine being himself becomes the centre and leader of human history. This is precisely what is accomplished through the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus of Nazareth. God's loving plan of salvation is "to bring all things in the heavens and on earth into one under Christ's headship." (Eph. 1: 10) Human history is no longer led by poor human beings, but headed by "Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). Christ is now the one head of the human race and the lord of its history.

This is not anything esoteric or strange. There is perfect complementarity between the views of salvation presented by different religions. The central fact is that all men constitute one family, a single organism with a single history. Christian experience of Christ is a view of God from the side of humanity

Only if he is truly the Son of God can Jesus Christ be "constituted" the Son of God for us in his resurrection, and made a quickening Spirit for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:45). Hinduism, on the other hand, views the phenomenon of the incarnation from the side of God and therefore tends to discount the humanity or finite nature of the *avatar* as a mere shadow. But the incarnation has to be viewed as truly human and the unique centre of the human history if the God-made-man should effectively lead humanity to salvation.

V. The Trinitarian Experience

The conception of three persons in the heart of the Godhead is an extension of our encounter with the divine Saviour. Salvation is the experience that we are not left alone in our human condition of ignorance and misery but are led from within ourselves by the Divine Spirit, the Atman, the true *Ātmya nīn* (Inner Controller), who gives us an inner freedom and tells us that we are truly the children of God, in that one Son of God whom we encounter as our Saviour. "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption through which we cry out 'Abba'" (Rom.8:14-15). In fact the key for solving the Trinitarian controversies in the early centuries of Christianity was a clear understanding of salvation. Fighting Subordinationism and Arianism the Fathers of the Church appeal to Christ's salvific role in order to show that he is truly the Son of God generated from all eternity and not a creature. If the Son is not truly God he did not really liberate us and we are not really adopted sons of God. Similarly they argue that if the Spirit is not truly God our divinization in salvation is not true either.

Awareness of three divine Persons in one God comes from a certain convergence of the personal and impersonal conceptions of the divine reality coupled with the conviction that any true experience of God should terminate in God as He is in Himself. Among the various impersonal ideas about God as the absolute and ultimate reality the three stand out as irreducible to each other: being, consciousness and bliss. Being is what is in itself and by itself, while consciousness implies a certain doubling of being upon itself, its being at home with itself; and bliss means a self-pos-

session of the conscious being. Though in fact it is the same reality that is in question, these represent three radically different dimensions which are not mere aspects nor synonyms but embrace the whole reality in a different relationship. As the Taittiriya Upanishad puts it, *satyam, jnanam anantam* Brahman: Brahman is immutable being, consciousness and infinite, or as later Vedantins formulated it, God is *saccidananda*, being, consciousness and bliss.

St. Augustine in explaining the mystery of the Trinity of God appeals to the same inner dynamism of being viewed from the psychology of man. If there is a true image of God in the whole universe it can be only in the human *psyche*, which in a sense is the highest point of finite reality. The soul appears as mind or the rational intelligence, the word of self-knowledge in which the act of knowing terminates and love which is in fact the self-gift of the knowing subject to itself. So also God as Father is the eternal mind, the Son is the Word, and the love and self-gift is the Holy Spirit.

Parallel to these inner dimensions of the Absolute Reality we have the functions ascribed to God in terms of the relation of dependence found in the finite world of beings. Since the finite things cannot explain themselves God has to be postulated as their creative principle, the mainstay and support of their remaining in existence, and the final resting place to which they return. Hinduism ascribes these three functions to three Gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesa who are in fact considered three forms of the one God. These parallel lines of the personalistic and the impersonal conceptions of God tend to converge and get unified.

In Judaism too the impersonal divine ideas like those of the law, the Word, Wisdom and Mystery tend to become gradually personified. On the other hand, personalist concepts like those of the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord and Angel tend to become slowly divinized and the two lines of thinking get progressively fused. But the radical difficulty involved in the fusion of the impersonal and personalistic conception of God is that the absolute reality of the divine gets internally divided and conditioned in a sort of real relation to the outside world. Then it becomes purely anthropomorphic conceptions of God or at best a functional and modalistic Trinity, both of which contradicts the very absolute

nature of God. Perhaps the root of this problem is in taking the finite nature as the model and starting point in understanding the absolute Reality.

But the uniqueness of the human person provides a special starting point for understanding the personal character of the divine. Personality is a unique category that does not demand any perfection absolute or finite. When a son stands before his father he acknowledges that all that he is and all that he has he has received. As a person he is simply the point of receptivity, some one who can receive everything and can dispose of himself completely. This personal identity is a unique point of departure for defining the divine reality. It relates to God as the absolute source for one's own personality, the one paternity from which all paternity in heaven and on earth is named. This personalist reference is found not only in the Father idea of the Old Testament and the New Testament, but even the Allah of the Koran and Brahman of the Upanishads. Another reference needed by the human person is an ideal of one's own fullest development, an image and imitation of God. This can be found in the idea of the divine Logos, which is the perfect image of the Godhead, the divine Son, and even in the Hindu figure of Vishnu who is the God of all incarnations and also the fullness of all created perfections. This relatedness of the human person to a divine or quasi-divine model is found to some extent even in such figures like *Nous* or storehouse of ideas of Neo Platonism, the Buddha of Buddhism, the Prophet of Islam and the Guru of Sikhism. A third openness of the human person is to an inner point of reference, an Antaryamin, the inner Controller, the divine Spirit that provides an inner ideal of what one has to be. These three lines of reference since they proceed from the empty point of the human person do not come under the categories of finite or infinite. They are three subsistent dimensions of the one absolute and infinite Reality.

Very often the Christian mystery of the Trinity of God has been presented as an esoteric doctrine, an item of Christian revelation which is not found in any other religion and is stated in the paradoxical formulation that one God is three persons. The three directional openness of the human person to the infinite is one's origin, model of ultimate perfection, and the inner Con-

troller, makes it possible to understand how God without any prejudice to or compromise of his infinite perfection is tripersonal since person is a category that belongs to an order of reality beyond all essences and perfections.

vi. The Fellowship of the Church

Perhaps the most crucial issue in a World Theology is the interrelationship of peoples and groups classified according to their religious allegiance. People living under the sacral regime of a particular religion tend to set up barriers between themselves and the "non believers" who are outsiders that can be brought into communion only through conversion. Traditionally religions tended to constitute distinct societies opposed to each other and to the secular society of the state. Today religious allegiance does not have the same importance as in the past. The real reasons that keep people apart are often geography, culture, social status or profession. If religious affiliation is given as a reason for keeping people apart the reason behind it is the socio-economic privileges and as far as religious authorities are concerned the power and influence religion brings them in their little sacral territory. That which actually divides people and sometimes sets them in opposition are their view of human prospects, their way of facing up to the modern challenges, age-old structures of injustice, exploitation and oppression. In our age of science and technology the centre of gravity has shifted from the sacred to the secular, from the religious to the profane. The paramount concern today is to make the earth habitable for all the children of God. Here the title "People of God" for believers has assumed a special significance. The true People of God are all the people God loves and that means all God's children, however marginalized they may be regarding their faith in the one Father of all human beings. Matter of religion can be considered only in this common context of humanity.

Judaism was a very exclusivistic religion. It could not accord any value to the religious experience of the Gentile nations nor allow them any share in the adventure of faith. Still, the Gentiles were not completely excluded from the Jewish vision of the future. The priesthood of Melchizedech, the faith and fidelity to God

the legendary Gentile individual Job, and the remarkable conversion of the Gentile people of Niniveh at the preaching of Jonah are all indications that the Jews realized that the Gentiles too were under the saving providence of God. But they did not consider the religious experience of the Gentiles to be of any value since they did not know the true God. Jesus Christ does not seek out the Gentiles but restricts his mission to Israel. Still, when he occasionally encounters the Gentiles he does not fail to marvel at the faith of the centurion whose child he was called upon to heal or of the Canaanite woman who with importunity asked for his help in the case of her daughter. He tells the Samaritan women that God is spirit, restricted neither to Jerusalem nor to Mount Gerisim but attainable to all who sought him in spirit and truth. In Christ's view worship of the Father in spirit and truth is bound up inextricably with the practice of fraternal charity. To the Jew who fell in the hands of robbers the true brother was neither the priest nor the levite but the alien Samaritan that took pity on his condition. Anyone who devotes his life to the service of the least of one's brethren, whether one realizes it or not, is on the way to encounter Jesus (see Matt. c. 25).

Hence the best way to build up all humanity into the one People of God and to initiate a dialogue of religions is not theoretically discussing the doctrinal differences of religions. Doctrines and principles are indeed important but they are only abstractions and summarised formulations. When such formulations whether philosophical or religious are taken as the point of departure for religious discussions the fact that they are historically and culturally conditioned is easily forgotten and the head on confrontation of opposing formulations becomes inevitable. No one can be asked to compromise what he holds as true, since such compromise will be a betrayal of truth itself. Since no one wants to admit a total defeat of one side and victory for the other, often dialogues end in a polite agreement to disagree, each of the partners leaving with a hidden complaisance in one's own truth and a condescending sympathy for the ignorance of the others. The way out of this impasse is to go back to the context of such formulations, namely the service of the least of our brethren in daily life where faith is actually lived and practised. In facing together in the light of religious faith the problems of humanity today, hunger and in-

justice, social, cultural and economic imperialism and threat of a nuclear holocaust of the whole human race, the unity and communion of all the children of the Father in heaven becomes apparent and the different ways of formulating that unity becomes flexible enough. What is important is to bring effectively all God's children in his one family.

Ecclesiastical structures including even liturgical worship are not pre-fabricated in heaven and superimposed on the believers from above. Actions, functions and services of everyday human life become sacralized and consecrated by the presence of God in our midst. In the place of the sacrifices of ancient religions Christ substituted his own death on the Cross as the one saving sacrifice of humanity. That death when it occurred had nothing hieratic or surreal in the eyes of the Jews or of the Romans. In the place of the more or less formal rites of the temple Christ instituted a brotherly meal, illuminated and sacralized it by his presence in their midst. The Mosaic authority of the Judaic priesthood was substituted by the service of love of the Apostles. Ecclesiastical structures should never become an end in themselves. If they should retain their salvific value they must maintain their rootedness in the actual life and service of the People of God.

Conclusion: The Question of Uniqueness

A vexing question in theology is the uniqueness of Christ and of Christianity. Christ is the one and only Saviour of all men. Christianity is not one religion among many but the one means of salvation, the one church that embraces all men saved in Christ. But the problem is that every other religion claims such uniqueness. Hinduism claims to be the *sanatanadharma*, the eternal religion that includes in it all other religions as its subsidiaries. Buddhism too is unique since Buddha's enlightenment and preaching are claimed to have started the Dharma wheel turning for all humanity. There is, however, no need to deny the uniqueness of other religions to establish the uniqueness of Christianity. In fact if a religion did not have something special and specific to contribute to humanity it would not have any right to exist.

What has to be emphasized here is that uniqueness is not necessarily having something which no one else has. A person with six fingers on a hand is not unique; he is a freak. Unique is what in a special manner realizes in itself something that is universally called for. Christianity is unique because it proclaims what is implicitly sought in every religion, that the human race which is one with a single history has effectively encountered God in Jesus of Nazareth. What happened in Jesus Christ, namely his sacrificial death and glorious resurrection has effectively transformed human history for all men; the human race has a new and divine head in whom divine life and salvation is made available to all. Christ and Christian Gospel are not a monopoly or a special privilege of any particular group, but the common right of all human beings. The church is Catholic not in the sense that it belongs only to the "Catholics", but because it is God's call to all men without exception. To make this Gospel known to all men the Church has to enter into active dialogue not merely in words but in real deed with men of other faiths. "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!"

Fordham University,
Bronx, N. Y. 10458

John B. Chethimattam

Missions on an Ecumenical Globe

A Conversation presupposing and establishing respect between widely different religious traditions has an embarrassing moment when the topic of missions is raised. Perhaps it would be better quickly to drop the topic. But I believe it forces us to ask some hard questions that give substance to the conversation. As I address the question of missions I beg some initial indulgence and considerable tolerance for irony. For it is only with irony, gentle and sometimes not so gentle, that we can think about the conversion of our own better half.

I

What makes the topic of missions problematic? To put this question in a forceful way, let me present three caricatures of cultural ideals, each with a typical mode of failure. Like most caricatures, these are literally true of no distinguished thinker or genuine religious group, yet are pervasively true for better or worse in powerful metaphoric ways.

The first cultural ideal is a common caricature of India. For Indian culture, "if some other culture is valuable, it must be the same as ours; all religions are at bottom one". This ideal is the engine behind the magnificent syncretism of Indian culture. Every culture receives a friendly reception. Polemical Westerners are driven to the despair of frustration because they can't pick a fight with a Hindu. Even the insistence that exclusiveness is the essence of one's religion evoked the Indian response, "Oh yes. Very good. We have that too".

Now the common failing of the syncretic ideal of India is that no matter how catholic its net, there is always some selective focus to the expression of the common core. Usually it is something like what the West has called the Perennial Philosophy. While that may be a genuinely pervasive theme in most cultures, it may not be the most important theme. In addition most cultures have adduced their own counter-cultural strains. So there may never be general satisfaction with the products of Indian syncretism. Nevertheless, that attitude, that ideal of cultural commerce, is the natural mother of conversations among the world's religions.

The second cultural ideal is a caricature of China. "If some other culture is genuinely different, it can't be truly valuable. There is a helpful realism to this ideal. It acknowledges that cultural tradition might be genuinely different, and thus makes the comparison of traditions an empirical question of truth an important one, a question that easily gets lost in efforts to be friendly

The common lapse from this ideal stems from the fact that judgements of difference and worth need not always stem from

careful, informed evaluation. They might merely be arbitrary assertions of local prejudice. Whereas there are both common themes in all religions and also particularities, the question of which is most important cannot be answered by presupposing one side or the other. May be the local identifications are not very significant in the long run.

The cultural ideal associated with the West, which I shall advocate, is one we might not be disposed to hear. "Other cultures are very different and also valuable in their own ways". This attitude differs from the caricature of India by supposing that other cultures have their own integrity which is not reducible even to the categories of Western culture, let alone the West's beliefs and values. It differs from the caricatured attitude of China by insisting that value is itself a function of culture, that other cultures have their own values in their own terms, and that it is not possible to contrast and compare the worths of different cultures except from some yet other perspective which adds to the plurality rather than reduces it.

The Western ideal has not always been this tolerant, of course, and one might well think that the opposite is the realistic depiction of Western attitudes and behavior. Christianity has thought itself the true religion, without which salvation is not possible. From the earliest Christian writings the theme of Christian triumphalism has been present. Christianity supersedes Jewish religion which is no longer regarded as valid or sufficient. The very name for Christian scriptures, New Testament, suggests that the Old Testament has been superseded and cannot stand as sufficient. The history of the relation between Christianity and Judaism reinforces the claim of triumphalism in the Christian self-consciousness. If Christianity is the proper advance upon Judaism, how much greater advance is it upon the other World religions, especially those of "primitive" cultures! Since the age of modern European empire, the purpose of Christian missions has been to convert people away from other religions to Christianity. In its history, Christianity has been among the least tolerant of religions, not the most respectful.

Yet here is the irony. The very imperialism by which Europe forced its economy, political authority, culture, and religion on most of the rest of the world brought it face to face with the greatness of alien culture. From the 16th century Roman Catholic missions in India and Asia to the 18th and 19th century protestant missions across the globe there has been a regular transformation of the missionary consciousness. First there is the self-confident proclamation of the Christian "truth", then a recognition that the other culture must be understood to get the truth across, then a patronizing translation of the other culture's writings into European languages, then a slow appreciation of how the West looks to those other cultures, and finally a self-consciousness bordering on embarrassment about Westerners being out of place. As so often has happened, the conquered conquer.

This shift in Western self-consciousness has been reinforced by the development of scholarly hermeneutical methods for the interpretation of scripture. Begun perhaps by Spinoza and developed by Jewish and Christian scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries, methodological exactitude for interpretation provides a relatively objective way of entering into alien cultural consciousness. The big shock was when the West found that its own ancient classical beginnings were extraordinarily alien. The quest for the historical Jesus did not always like what it found. When hermeneutical methods are transferred over to the study of other cultural traditions there is usually less shock than that accompanying self-non-recognition. The West now has developed, or is in the process of developing, scholarly tools for understanding with objectivity and empathy the traditions framing all world religions, acknowledging both commonality and diversity.

Undergirding this development of scholarly objectivity is the European Enlightenment. For all its superficiality and adolescent rationalism, the Enlightenment destroyed the innocence of Western religious culture. And a good thing it did, too! For that innocence was the violent imposition of Western religion on other people, Christian (and sometimes Moslem) triumphalism moved along by gunpowder. Western Christians cannot appropriate the scientific culture without also picking up the sense of self-alienation and distance that comes from the Enlightenment's destruction of innocence. Though fundamentalists may whistle loudly in the dark, the day when triumphalism can command the imagination

of the great minds who fix culture has passed. And for this reason we say that the cultural ideal of the West now is that "other cultures are very different, and also valuable in their own ways". For all the evils of imperialism, its virtue is the invention of this new and tolerant piety

But then what do missions do, if not convert? This is the problem. The answer is distressingly simple: they share the contributions of their own religious traditions with others. Spreading the gospel, conveying the compassion of the Buddha, can mean enriching others; it need not mean supplanting them. But this answer is indeed distressing.

II

How can we, or anyone, be religious in a world with many profound religious cultures? Wouldn't things be simpler with less sharing? Can we be authentic in any religion without stopping our ears and closing our mouths? There are extraordinarily serious issues for people engaged in conversation with religions of the world. There are at least two seductive but ultimately unhelpful attitudes to take toward them.

One mistaken attitude is to stand fast in our own tradition. Much recommends this attitude. It acknowledges that the components of ritual, myth, and spiritual practices in a religious tradition grow from the deepest and broadest roots of experience, roots that often cannot be discerned directly and that surely come from a past long lost. At the very least, any historically ancient religious tradition is genuinely human, rich beyond the imagination of any enlightenment rationalist attempting to define religion. Furthermore, this attitude recognizes that access to a religious tradition is no easy matter. What can make a tradition live for us depends on so many subtle factors having to do with history, character, and elementary cultural environment that it is impossible to predict in advance whence our spiritual destinies can arise. So our native religious tradition has an obvious head start.

Ironically, however, the very historical particularity of any of the world traditions is what makes it inadequate for our own time. For, the one situation of which all the world's traditions

are innocent is that of our own time when the traditions meet each other and the modern world. Of course there have been encounters of alien traditions in the past, the encounter in India for instance, in which the religion of the *Bhagavad Gita* arose from the meeting of Aryan and Dravidian elements, or that in China where Buddhism encountered Taoism, or in medieval Europe where Christianity responded to Islam. But never has there been just the current encounter. And therefore, in some sense and to some degree each religion is unprepared to be our spiritual home. We cannot stand fast with our native tradition because even were we to try the tradition would have to be modified to be the vehicle for current spiritual life. The alternative is to close our minds to the potential contribution and challenge of other traditions, and deliberate not-hearing has rarely worked, never for long.

A second attitude is opposite to the first and equally unhelpful. It is to attempt to combine all the interesting religions in a concrete syncretistic whole. In some sense, of course, we do something of the sort, for each tradition contains within itself a variety of strains appropriate for different levels of maturity, and we run through them serially. Similarly many Americans today, raised in an immature version of a Western religion try out Buddhism for a while, then Vedanta, Taoism, Krishnamurti, Hassidism, and finally a private blend. How difficult it is, nevertheless, to find the deep resonances of any tradition when each is put on as a garment. There is more hope in patterned syncretism rather than serial syncretism. That is, with sufficient personal knowledge of oneself and an abiding scholarly interest in penetrating beyond the seductive, one can assemble a spiritual practice that makes for progress and growth. But religion is not merely private spiritual practice. It is also public ceremony and action, often of a moral or political character. To hazard a "content" remark., one theme common to nearly all traditions (except those of the perennial philosophy, ironically) is that true salvation involves seeing the pointlessness of an interest in salvation and a turning back to the world with melioristic compassion. One can no more stitch together one's personal religion than one can rigidly hold to one's religious starting point. Growth is more subtle than either strategy.

From this discussion it is possible to suggest three positive conditions necessary for religious life in the world today, necessary but not sufficient conditions.

1) The first is that it is necessary to attach oneself to one of the great cultural traditions with ancient roots.

Given the branchings and spreadings of these traditions, one cannot embrace the whole of any one. But an encounter with some expression of antiquity is possible. Perhaps even two great traditions can be encountered in depth. The reason for this condition is the necessity of having access to elementary responses, human-building responses to the depths and margins of life in various geographical and historical manifestations. Most traditions, for instance, have a layer of fertility ritual and mythos on which is superimposed a layer of political order and mythos celebrating lordship. Most of the great traditions have a mythic and ritual layer which has been responsive to the upheavals of empire, the loss of dialect and sacred family territory, resulting in a concern for identity and immortality. Who knows what else lies woven into the fabric of tradition which speaks to deep human sensitivities? One needs to find a tradition with depths worth plumbing, and then to plumb them.

2) A second condition, building on the first, is the need to engage other traditions experientially.

Of course there is a limit to one's possible extension here. But the extension must go far enough to discover those traditions and explore them as alternate ways of being human. That is one of the ironies of essential humanity: to be human by facing alternate ways of being human. It is not far from the commandment to love different people. One can always ask how far it is necessary to go, how scholarly one should be, how seriously one must take the other, whether one must abandon one's native tradition's essence in order to appreciate another's. I doubt there is any one answer to these questions. They are to be answered differently by different people according to the demands of circumstance and the resources of their environments and character. To fail to engage others, however, is to refuse the offer of sharing. It is to set an arbitrary limit to what one responds to as valuable.

This is the condition for which missions have an imperative. Just as we need access to other traditions in order to be human ourselves, so it is necessary to provide access to others who need to share our own. Humility in missions can come when they are viewed as a means to return payment to those who have shared the wealth of their traditions with us.

3) We need to be attentive to inventing new social forms for which religion can be a vital element in our world.

This is not exactly inventing a new religion, surely not a new consistent religion. But we need forms that allow us to carry over the accumulated divine life of the past into a situation where our new circumstances are addressed. When the Mesopotamian city states mastered food production so that fertility was not the dominant concern and then they had to invent social class structure for their burgeoning populations, they did not eliminate the mythos of fertility religion. Rather they laid down a layer of political religion on top, without consistency but also without contradiction. Imagine the genius of Jesus, penetrating through the political ritual of passover to the cannibal fertility sacrifice in order to incarnate the presence of a loving God in a displaced people! We too must be attentive to social forms that address our current situation without loss of the depths of past achievements. As I say, however, inventing new forms is one thing, being attentive to the invention is another. Only the latter is a serious possibility, and for the actual substance we must wait upon the Lord, as Isaiah would put it.

To hasten the day of new life, we can set ourselves to developing a theology for world religions. There is no longer an excuse to avoid the connective and general issues. At the same time we can put the intellectual debates where they belong, important but not determining, and attend directly to people. People the world over need food, justice, freedom and comfort. No religion should deny them these basic things or set doctrinal obstacles in the way of administering them. Finally we must be attentive to the unique realities of our situation, to our economic and political forms, to the advance of technology and education, and especially to the critical encounter of world religions. Then perhaps we can be alert to the opportunities for new forms of spiritual life.

State University of New York
at Stony Brook.

Robert C. Neville

Dialogue as a Spiritual Resource

Interreligious dialogue today is bearing its attention on mankind's problems. These problems have reached a critical threshold, so that it is no exaggeration to speak of a *crisis of humanity*, a crisis which is hourly brought home to us in the thought that we may soon be singing hymns in eternity. It is the issue of the threat of nuclear war and the arms race that lends the urgency to our deliberations.

On the other hand, and related, our need to explore the possibility – still more – the necessity of using our religious and contemplative insights to broaden our awareness of this crisis in all of its dimensions, and to deal with other key concerns as well, i. e., world hunger, poverty, injustice, suppression of rights, conflict between states, and peace etc., is based in part on the realization that we now have to *do* something in order to alter the currently confrontational, competitive nature in the superpower relationship. We have to do something about changing that consciousness. There is no solution as long as the two sides – and other parties – are locked into a mental straight jacket, a habit of mind that prevents any change in the perspective, and hence in the confrontational relationship. The theme thus draws its significance from the failure of the superpowers and other governments to not simply ease tensions, but to change the foundation in national consciousness for the existence of tension, especially the kind that could produce war. Our focus also draws its significance from the failure of governments to aid the millions of starving, the refugees of war, the homeless, sick and illiterate of too many nations.

We know that governments are at wits' end, that they do not have solutions, only more of the same. And they do not have solutions because they do not want to change their goals, their interests to which their ideological commitments bind them. And so a few world leaders hold all of humanity captive in a terrible fear, since they cannot break out of their logical trap. Nor are they willing to accept diversity or pluralism; this is true of some.

In this brief article, I want to discuss dialogue, looking into its nature and necessity, determining what hinders and advances it. Also, I want to glance at its fruits, which I see as a means towards a globalization of awareness, and so as an application of a primary spiritual resource towards the amelioration of the present human situation.

It seems to me that dialogue is one of the answers or spiritual resources we can utilize and apply to mankind's contemporary ills. For dialogue is at the heart of life. At every stage of human development there is an appropriate degree of dialogue to which the capacity of the person corresponds. Little children talk with their playmates about their fantasies, and play itself is a way to act out a dialogue or communicate. A child's converse with his father, however, is quite different in quality than that with his playmates. He or she may ask the father why the sun shines, birds fly or water is wet. The quality is decidedly more philosophical.

Similarly, a typical teenager's dialogue with his peers centers around cars, people, drugs, clothing, acceptance by others, a girl friend or boyfriend etc. The content of conversation is pretty mundane. Furthermore, the college student, in a bull session with his friends, continues some of the themes of his high school days, but there is often more intellectual substance in his conversation. By the time he gets to graduate school, he is able to participate in a more formal dialogue in a seminar in which the structure and content are somewhat controlled by a socratic method of questioning the text, the professor, and the other students. Dialogue thus becomes more focused, and in a sense, forced and staged.

When scholars meet, however, especially if they are friends, their dialogical relation takes the form of sharing their professional discoveries, questions, their enthusiasm and personal interests. Dialogue here is more human in feeling, and has an element of communion to it. Likewise, the dialogue of two who love each other may often seem petty and even silly, but this is because their converse aims at communion.

Now the conversation between contemplatives is usually more focused and simple; it is never in a hurry. It has something of substance in it. Contemplatives may share their delight in the meta-

physical depth they see in a flower, butterfly, mountain, a cat or a bird, or they may just sit for long periods in silence. It is this quality of dialogue that is the heart of contemplation, and it reveals something of the mystery of how a contemplative soul carries on dialogue with God. Its content may be a few words, and then silence. And is it not in the silence that the deepest degree of dialogue is reached?

Dialogue involves relationship and some form of communication. It is relational because man is a relational being, which expresses itself in his personalism. In his ceaseless dialogues – no matter the stage – if they are sincere, he communicates something of himself and his mystery. It is also true that his need to communicate is related to his need to know, as much as it is to his need for others. Insofar as a person has a mouth, he or she is dialogical. For dialogue springs from the nature of man, and it points to what John Chethimattam calls his “dialogal psychic structure”.¹ Something in man’s nature compels him to communicate with others.

Man’s *dialogal* nature reflects being itself. It is because being is intrinsically dialogical and relational that man’s nature tends towards communication. At the core of being there is a dynamic communion going on. Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux) sees in the Trinitarian mystery both the source and the model of true dialogue and personal relationship. Referring to the inner dynamism of being, which the Trinity is, he says: “Communion in non-duality, unity in self-communication – such is the law of being.”² In human dialogue we strive to realize this unity that is the ground of our life.

In conversation or in silence, in substantive dialogue, we are participating in the deeper ontological mystery of existence, a mystery that is rooted in the Trinitarian interaction at the heart of the Real. We are part of that dynamic dialogue of the Three Persons. We desire communication with others because we are imitating the essential dialogal pattern of the Trinity’s inner life: dynamic self-communication in intimacy. We are constituted for others, to be-with others in depth converse. Abhishiktananda, commenting on the nature of the Trinity as the source and model for human living, says that the “...Trinity reveals that *Being* is essentially a *koinonia* of love; it is communion, a reciprocal call

to be: it is being-together, being-with. *co-esse...*"³ And it is in fruitful togetherness which is grounded in the essential, that this dialogal pattern is actualized for us.

The Necessity for Dialogue

The need to pursue dialogue has two basic levels: a spiritual and a practical necessity for communication. We have already alluded to the metaphysical root of dialogue. Now we must apply dialogue to the context of man's life with others in its existential reality. When we do this we discover that it has a spiritual dimension, which flows from its ontological source in the divine mystery, and a practical dimension which exists because of the fact of diversity or pluralism.

In a very real sense, the spiritual necessity for a deeper conversation involves the content of that ontological mystery in which man participates. And that content is what the Truth ultimately is. Man needs to know this Truth, and so this need forms his desire for dialogal situations. John Chethimattam says it best when he says that dialogue is "... a common search for Truth that transcends all particular traditions".⁴ Because we want to *know*, we seek the company of the wise.

Spiritual necessity also concerns the interior aspect of dialogue, its connection with the individual's quest for the Absolute, as well as the ramifications of personal discovery for the community of man. Man — each person — is a receptivity or an openness to God, a capacity for Him. This receptivity is characterized by an intense desire for unity with God. It is really the deepest longing of the heart. Now whatever brings the soul to realization of its oneness with the Divine is supremely relevant. And just as God or the Absolute is infinite in consciousness, so the soul or person strives to be identified with that infinite life and being of the divine Consciousness. This is the nature of contemplative dialogue with the Source of being. The soul wants God, and so it can no longer be satisfied merely with the externals of faith or the allurements of secular life.

We are all, in some way or another, on this journey to the source, to God. That is what life is all about. As we move along the path, we begin to see that life is a "school" in which we learn to care, and in which we are also educated in the "science" or "art" of divine things.

It is then possible for us to see the followers of other traditions not as hostile and opposed to our faith, but as co-travellers and brothers on the way. Then we know that they can teach us something of great value and vice versa. Further more, when we understand that dialogue - on an ultimate level of depth - implies being open to the possibility of some form of assimilation from other paths as they present something of value to our own journey and inner experience of God. This is the essential encounter with others - the depth level in religious dialogue.

Abhishiktananda feels that this is the way for us to move forward. He explains: "It is by exchanging their personal experience of God that men have progressed and still progress in their knowledge and understanding of the divine mystery".⁵ And John Chethimattam - on the universal plane of formal dialogue among religions - encourages sustained, co-operative efforts of the various traditions to make the divine mystery intelligible by seeing the complementary nature of the religions. He is thinking in terms of a larger metaphysical frame-work into which all the genuine religions fit, since none of them can exhaust the divine mystery which overflows every tradition.⁶

The practical necessity for dialogue is primarily to avoid conflict. It is also to promote understanding, co-operation and mutual discovery, all of which dialogue affords. It is so important for the religions - and other movements - to internalize the values of communication and interdependence, for if they can accomplish this feat, then they will be an example to the governments. And they will have established the practical wisdom and virtue of communication over conflict. This would contribute to the international community a new pattern of behavior, one that emphasizes understanding and co-operation. It would be a giant step forward in man's moral evolution. He will then have acquired the capacity to tolerate diversity. The practical necessity for dialogue stems from this reality of diversity. For it is "... above everything else, the phenomenon of religious pluralism (that) calls for dialogal cooperation".⁷

One of the most serious sources of conflict is the attitude of the mind set - of fundamentalism, which exists virtually in every religious, cultural and political grouping. Fundamentalism is a "universal" problem. It is the primary obstacle in the way of genuine dialogue. Of course, the worst form of this attitude is when it becomes the policy of a state. Then the danger is much more than simple misunderstanding, hostility or open conflict, since that power can resort to pressure tactics through intimidation, arrest, torture and even execution. Fundamentalism, as an attitude and a practice, is intolerant of pluralism, and wants total uniformity of belief.

The fundamentalist posture - be it Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic, Marxist, humanist or "scientific" - destroys the very possibility for meaningful dialogue. The fundamentalist, in whatever form, claims to be in full possession of the truth. And it is this claim to have "... a monopoly of (the) truth (that) closes the door to real dialogue".⁸ Fundamentalism is characterized by this stand of exclusivity, but this attitude is itself a form of reductionism. It reduces all other positions, of which it probably has no conception, to the parameters of its own explanatory system. Indeed, it is reductionistic because it is exclusivistic. It cannot possibly allow a challenge, since that would deprive it of its privileged position.

For this reason, moreover, the fundamentalist posture is profoundly uncritical. It will not allow reflection beyond the bounds of its universe of discourse. In fact, it discourages thinking. For thinking raises questions, and fundamentalism is terribly uncomfortable when there are too many critical questions, unless they be ones that are easily accommodated with the basic position.

This whole tendency in man has its origin in ignorance and fear and insecurity: ignorance of what is outside the system and of its own deeper dimension, fear of all that is different from the system and so intolerance, and insecurity, a sense of uneasiness in the world and with others. Dialogue with such people would be embarrassingly awkward at best, and impossible at worst. Fundamentalism belongs to mankind's past.

What advances dialogue or communication, even more than symposia, seminars, conferences, ecumenical gestures, and the general educative process etc., is an inner openness to other traditions, which seeks a symbiotic contact with the deeper values, intuitions and experiences of these traditions. We can call this form of openness to others *existential dialogue*. Bede Griffiths describes the task of this depth or contemplative dialogue. He says: "It means entering into the other religion as far as one is able to encounter it in depth and to relate it in a living synthesis with one's own experience of faith."⁹

In one of the most extraordinary experiments in the history of humanity, Jules Monchanin, Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths – all Westerners (two Frenchmen and one Englishman) – went out to India, and began the long process of this existential dialogue in depth with Hinduism. They each remained firmly anchored in the Christian faith, but they did not fear to explore the spiritual treasures of Indian culture, especially that of the Vedanta. All the three inwardly appropriated this tradition in its experiential depths. They went through it, and it was a road that led them through the mystical experiences of *advaita* (non-duality), into *saccidananda*, being-knowledge-bliss, the bliss of being absolutely aware of being, and finally into the heart of the Trinitarian mystery. They found the saccidanandan and Trinitarian intuitions to coincide on the deepest level of interiority, in the "cave of the heart".¹⁰

The three of them assumed Hindu *sannyasa*, the life of a renunciate or monk. And yet they retained their identity as Western monks. Their existential dialogue with Hinduism led them to the essence of the tradition, and to take upon themselves the chief means of breaking through to the "further shore" of being on the other side of death. The aim of Monchanin, Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths was to penetrate India's knowledge of God, which they did. What they have done, and the discoveries they made indicate a future course of dialogue among the traditions and all humanity.

Bede Griffiths offers a piece of advice to monks, which is also illustrative – in terms of methodology – of the task for all those called to dialogue. He states clearly: "It is the task of the

Christian monk to try to enter into the whole tradition of Indian *Sannyasa*...in order to 'realize' God, to discover the indwelling presence of God both in nature and in the soul"¹¹. Existential dialogue aims at depth consciousness; it tries to get at the mystical core of the other tradition to which it is related in so intimate a way.

This quality of dialogue requires most of all a generosity and openness. It means humility in the acknowledgment of one's limited knowledge, and *trust* in the experience of others who represent the tradition that one is exploring. But this kind of openness arises out of inner freedom, calm and spiritual maturity. Abhishiktananda adds: "Openness to others in dialogue depends on openness to the Spirit in oneself".¹² And, commenting on the Church's onetime exclusivity, in a letter to his disciple Marc Chaduc, he writes: "The Church claims to possess the Holy Spirit; it certainly does... but in a cage!"¹³

The existential encounter between and among different spiritual paths has to take place within the mystical core of interiority. It cannot limit itself to the academic level - be that philosophical, theological or cultural - nor to a discussion of mysticism as such. The dialogue has got to reach the depths of interiority. Abhishiktananda puts it this way: "The only real meeting-point between men concerned with the ultimate is in the centre of the self, in the 'cave of the heart'..."¹⁴

It seems to me that this bold, creative experiment of this movement in inter-monastic dialogue in India, whose influence is now being felt in Europe and America as well, can serve as a *model* for depth dialogue with other traditions, but it can also be employed in the attempts at communication between and among states. Governments must pass beyond recourse to mere negotiation and bargaining in order to settle their disputes and solve other world problems. If they want real understanding then perhaps they ought to plunge into the same quality of existential depth dialogue. And so they can learn a great deal about tolerance of diversity, listening, openness and trust from this movement.

The Fruits of Dialogue

Whenever and wherever a true dialogal situation develops a number of positive results occur. These are the fruits of dialogue. One of these fruits is understanding. The area of one's knowledge of another tradition, movement, person etc. is enlarged. And with increased understanding comes a deep sympathy. A further fruit of dialogue is peace, a pervasive sense of ease and calm with others. This peace extends to all whom we meet.

Depth dialogue results in a genuine respect for diversity or pluralism, and regards "unity in diversity" and "diversity in unity" to be a central ideal of the future. Pluralism, as history shows, is the crucial test of compassion and humanity, and, more than in any other epoch, it is pluralism that is the main problem of the contemporary world. Does not dialogue, in its social, religious, political and economic dimensions aim at this ideal of respect for diversity? But this respect is hard won in a world dominated by the cult of power, since certain forms of political power cannot countenance pluralism. And yet we cannot afford not to have it.

When there is this profound respect for others, when there is an openness and a spirit of "unity in diversity" then the desire for cooperation grows, a desire to collaborate on matters of substance. This is one of the great fruits of dialogue. In what follows, I want to explore this positive result of the dialogal relationship in a creative way.

When I began this paper, I did so by referring to how this gathering is different from most academic conferences. That difference was found to be in an *activist* focus, and a theme that would ponder and develop the application of spiritual resources towards the resolution of mankind's very difficult and seemingly insoluble problems. This awareness of our focus, and the urgency of our task, seems to have come to us through the failure of governments to deal with a number of tragic ills, that - if unchecked - could consume man. The governments have run out of answers because of the low level of awareness from which they ask the questions. They want to perpetuate the so-called status quo, which means, for the world, to continue a progressively dangerous instability. The only way that governments can find real answers is to look

in other directions, since of themselves they lack the depth resources from which to extricate the world from its present difficulties. They must look to morality, religious wisdom and spirituality in order to acquire the necessary awareness that will allow solutions. It all comes to this need: a globalization of consciousness. This is the way out for man, or the way "in", and the governments are powerless to bring it about, or to prevent it from happening.

The religious, spiritual, moral and educational leaders of humanity must cooperate to spark this globalization of awareness on our planet. This does not mean getting too involved with the political process, but of generating our own process, one that will act as a catalyst in the international realm by igniting a lucid awareness in the masses of mankind, and awakening them to the gravity of the crisis of our time. The very real threat of global annihilation compels us to find a way to *act* in order to *save* humankind and the world itself. In this conviction – that we must act – I can accept Marx's challenge: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in **various** ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."¹⁵

Now we have to change the world by transforming its consciousness not simply its power structures. We need a revolution in the hearts of people, in their consciences. For it is 'conscientisation' that is the goal, the awakening of the masses to an awareness of the threat to the created order, and to every living creature. What we require is a global spiritual awakening, or else the dark forces will consume the world by conflict. It is this spiritual awakening of humanity that is the crown of globalization. And this awakening is the real revolution. Indeed, the spiritual awakening of the masses is the definitive revolution, the final one.

True dialogue brings with it the possibility of cooperation; it makes us conscious of the fact that we have a profound spiritual resource and great strength in cooperation for the survival of man and this planet, and cooperation in the discovery of ways to feed the hungry; house the homeless; give medical attention regularly to the ill; solace to the oppressed, and hope to those in despair.

One way in which we can realize the goal of this global cooperation of all spiritual forces is to promote the idea of

World Assembly of mankind's religious, spiritual, moral, educational and scientific leaders.¹⁶ They would come from every nation and culture of the earth. Their aim would be to work together – in perpetual dialogue – for world peace, disarmament, justice (economic and spiritual), international cooperation, human rights, the alleviation of hunger, poverty and disease, the 'conscientization' of the world and each other, and the advancement of the best values in man's religious and cultural experience. These include interiority or contemplation, depth dialogue or existential communication, tolerance of diversity, trust, sharing and love.

This Assembly could be temporary or permanent; it could exist and function for as long as the present crisis of humanity lasts. In time, it might become a parallel structure to the United Nations, or part of it, but with a different role: to give needed guidance to the nations and peoples of the world in the civilizing values of the Spirit. It would act as a check against the irresponsible behavior of many states. The first priority of this Assembly should be the vigorous and persistent encouragement of *total* disarmament simultaneously by all countries. This is the only way disarmament will ever work.

In our cooperation we can accomplish much. Without it, we can do little that would be effective in reaching our goals. We are at a crucial juncture in man's evolution. Time is quickly running out. To achieve the globalization of awareness needed to stop the arms race and the threat of nuclear war, we must seize the initiative in history away from the exclusive domain of political leaders, and focus the collective consciousness of mankind on a more humane and spiritually enlightened vision of the future. In this concrete way, we will have taken the precious resource of communication, and put it to work for man in the process of solving the most serious of his problems, that of survival. If we can find a solution here, the other problems will be easier to handle. This seems to be the task for us in this period of historical time, a period so much in need of hope. Let us give the world this hope.

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1. John B. Chethimattam, "Man's Dialogical Nature and the Dialogue of Religions", *Journal of Dharma*, vol. I, no. 1, 1975, p. 10.
 2. Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point: Within the Cave of the Heart* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1976), p. 119.

3. Idem, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974), p. 135
4. "Man's Dialogical Nature", p.20
5. Abhishiktananda, "The Depth Dimension of Religious Dialogue", *Vidyajoti*, vol. YLV, May 1981.
6. "Man's Dialogical Nature", p. 21.
7. Ibid., p. 27.
8. Ibid., p. 21,
9. Bede Griffiths, *Christ In India: Essays towards a Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 200
10. Idem. *The Marriage of East and West* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate, 1982), p. 190. See also Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda*, p. 178.
11. Bede Griffiths, *Christ in India*, p. 24
12. Abhishiktananda, "Depth Dimension", p. 219.
13. Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "The Spiritual Journey of Father Henri Le Taux-Abhishiktananda", a talk given at the East West Monastic Symposium, Holyoke, Mass., November 1980, (unpublished), p. 10.
14. Abhishiktananda. "Depth Dimension", p. 208.
15. Frederick Engels, "Theses on Feuerbach", *Ludwig Feuerbach* (New York: International Publishers. 1941), p. 84.
16. I have proposed such an idea in an article. See "The Contemporary Challenge", *Journal of Dharma*, vol. VII, no. 1, Jan. March 1912, pp. 100-111.

Wayne Teasdale

Varieties of Orientalism:

(A Review of some Recent Books and Documents on the Oriental Identity of the Syro-Malabar Church)

In recent years a great deal of effort has been made to define and defend the oriental identity of the Malabar Church. This is a very laudable effort since a proper understanding of our identity is a primary requisite for achieving the proper growth and development of the Church. On the one hand it helps us to discern and avoid blind imitations of other traditions and to exclude whatever does not agree with the organic evolution of our tradition. On the other hand, since the equality of all Rites in the Church has now been firmly established, it enables us to argue for our legitimate rights against the established encroachments into them by the Roman Rite, which has divided the whole world into territories of Latin dioceses pushing the Oriental Churches to the verge of extinction.

But here one has to be very careful about the way the identity and rights of an individual Church is argued and established. Sometimes friends are more dangerous than enemies. The Latins who argue against our rights are themselves fully conscious that they have a very weak case: If all the three Rites in India are equal, who gave the Latin bishops the authority to deny us the possibility of caring for the members of our church wherever they are? Which of the Latin prelates including even the Roman Congregations for Evangelization and for the Oriental Churches have any legal authority to go against the clear provisions and directives of Vatican Council II regarding the rights of Orientals residing in other territories? If Jacobites and Marthomites can build their own churches, schools and other institutions for their people in Bombay, Madras and Delhi why should the same right be denied to the Catholic Malankarites and Malabarians? But the real question is how one argues for one's legitimate rights. If one brings forward twenty five phoney arguments to prove a legitimate case the opposing counsel can make an apparently valid case by showing up the flaw in the arguments adduced. A more serious question raised even by ardent supporters of the Oriental cause is:

once we have secured our rights what do we do with the cultured, educated, sophisticated modern (Syro) Malabarians of Delhi, Bombay and Madras, not to speak of those in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia? Shall we take them back to the decadent religious culture of the 10th or 11th century Chaldeans as some of our Orientalists would like to do? The types of Orientalism presented in some of the recent books and documents that tend to this direction have to be critically examined if fad and fashion should not be allowed to lead us to undesirable consequences. In this review article I shall examine a few of them.

- i. Fr. Placid J. Podipara CMI: *Reflections on Liturgy* (Kottayam: St. Thomas Seminary, 1983, pp. 103)

As a pioneer in the arduous and often thankless job of restoring the (Syro)Malabar liturgy Father Placid deserves special gratitude and admiration. His *Reflections*, however, reveal also two contradictory and often self-defeating attitudes assumed in the matter of liturgy. On the one hand, he admits that the one liturgy of Christ got diversified by the vicissitudes of time "the cultural environments and needs of different places" (p. 18). The growth of the liturgy did not follow "the relentless logic of the schoolmen" but moved in the style of the Fathers: "In the process of development of liturgies towards their final goal, there was mutual borrowing on a large scale; but things borrowed were assimilated rather than merely juxtaposed." (p. 20) But the author does not explain why this "style of the Fathers" completely ceased at a golden age in the past, and the process of dynamic assimilation of new elements is almost unthinkable in his conception of the Malabar liturgy today. The excuse he gives is "assimilation was easy in the absence of a definite individuality or physiognomy in *facto esse*" (p. 20). This can only mean a certain old age and hardening of the arteries of the rite in question. In fact it is when an organism has attained real maturity and adulthood that it can assimilate new elements and adapt itself to changing situations without losing its individuality.

Liturgy is such a complex phenomenon that picking and choosing certain elements and omitting certain others one can easily distort its true image. One can even quote words of Vatican II and yet present an image of the liturgy diametrically opposed to

hat of the Council. Father Placid defines liturgy as "the public worship of the church", the worship of God through actions, words and gestures that are instituted by Christ, or by the Church, performed in the name of the Church by ministers legitimately constituted for the purpose, in the manner legitimately prescribed. Of course, Christ the Eternal Priest is invisibly present; each of the faithful in his or her own way joins with the human minister specifically constituted for the purpose. But the whole emphasis is on the accurate performance of the prescribed ritual in the name of the Church. This sounds very much like a definition taken from the court ceremonial of Louis XIV of France. It does not matter whether one internally experiences or not; external accurate performance is what matters. The priests are mere functionaries executing what is prescribed for them, in the name of the "Church". What is meant by the church here seems to be the ecclesiastical authority prescribing or approving the liturgical texts.

What is lacking in this mechanical, legalistic approach to liturgy is a sense of the actual presence and activity of Christ, continuing his work of redemption in the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit: "Christ is always present in his Church especially in her liturgical celebrations...in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church." The Church of the liturgy is not merely the ecclesiastical authority but the worshipping People of God: Christ "is present when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised [where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them] (Mt, 18:20)" (S.C.S 7). Even the most perfectly composed and ecclesiastically approved liturgical texts and beautifully organized ceremonies become liturgy only when they are actually celebrated by the praying People of God. Father Placid states that the pious practices of the faithful like the Rosary and the Way of the Cross "are not liturgical, since they are not instituted as such by the Church" (p.11). Will an arbitrary institution by the ecclesiastical authority make them liturgical? Is not even the ecclesiastical authority bound by the inner laws of the liturgy which is the worship of the whole Mystical Body, Christ and his members? What actually *Sacrosanctum Concilium* says is: "Popular devotions of the Christian people provided they conform to the laws and norms of the Church are to be highly recommended." (SC S13) The sharp distinction between liturgical

prayers and merely "private" devotions is one introduced by Latin jurists; Orientals have never heard of such a distinction. How can the prayers of the faithful inspired by the Spirit of God and led by Christ be called purely "private" or judged simply "non-liturgical"? When one begins to pray in faith one moves from the isolated "I" of the individual to the communitarian "We" of the People of God. Such devotions are not, however, formally liturgical, not because they lack a formal institution by an ecclesiastical authority, but because by their very nature and structure they are peripheral to the celebration of the universal mystery of Redemption. Even giving Rosary, Benediction, Way of the Cross and other devotions some Oriental colour and solemnity, as Fr. Placid suggests, and any amount of ecclesiastical "institution" will not make them part of the liturgy properly so called! It is high time that our liturgists got out of this Latin juridicism and examined closely the intrinsic nature and structure of the liturgy.

Father Placid correctly states "that it is not a particular liturgy in itself that specifically constitutes different communities into different particular churches" and that the recognition of a community as a particular church in the canonical sense "may have nothing in itself regarding its liturgy" (p.15). But at the same time he demands from the Apostolic Church of St. Thomas a strict conformity to the East Syrian liturgy. The only reasons he gives are: (1) East Syrian liturgy could have been known in Malabar from the very beginning. (2) Whatever may have been the state of the fluid liturgy of the Apostolic period, "the only developed liturgy the Malabar Church has had must be said to be the East Syrian" (p.70). Cannot one argue with greater historical probability that when the bishops of the Church of St. Thomas died out our fathers had no other option except to borrow from the neighbouring church of Chaldea their bishops, who naturally brought along with them their liturgy too? In any case why should we passively accept and continue to live with a liturgy which is quite foreign to our culture and unsuited to our apostolic tasks, and why should we not appropriately modify it according to the needs of our times?

- ii. E. R. Hambey S. J., *Dimensions of Eastern Christianity*, (Kottayam: St. Thomas Seminary, 1983, pp. 167)

Father Hambey is one of those Latin missionaries who have of their own accord chosen to spend a great deal of their time and energy to educate the ignorant (Syro-)Malabarians about their oriental identity. The book is a revised version of the class notes of the course he gives at the Vadavathoor seminary. It presents a brief historical overview of the origin and development of the Eastern Churches. The main problem with the book is that like other church historians who pretend to write "scientific" history the author too interprets the evolution of the different churches purely through the political events and does not pay enough attention to the sincere and arduous way in which traditions, churches and individual scholars developed step by step the theological concepts and different styles of theologizing in the course of history. In fact the development of these lines of theological thinking is the soul and life-line of the history of the church. Hence, in my view, as a text book for future priests this book is somewhat defective and even misleading. Secondly, the author's description of "the fundamental aspects of the Christian East are mostly over-simplifications". The "liturgical vision and life" he attributes to the Eastern churches are to a great extent what are being emphasized by Latin liturgists as well. In this context we recall what he had described in an earlier publication as "the chief characteristics of the East-Syrian tradition": (1) A spirituality of the Resurrection; (2) a spirituality of the Bible; (3) a symbolical structure and a sense of the divine mystery; (4) contemplating the mysteries of Redemption both in its historical and eschatological dimensions; (5) a deep sense of the Church as the salvific community (see "The Syro-Malabar Liturgy and Its Reform" in *A Study of the Syro-Malabar Liturgy*, ed.G. Vavanikunnel, Changana-cherry, 1976 pp.51 - 52). Can any one imagine any Christian Church without these five fundamental characteristics?

In the last chapter of the book the author bewails the reluctance of Oriental Catholics to get "Orientalized". This socio-psychological behaviour he ascribes to "confusing Rome and the Roman system" which "tends to create an inferiority complex towards Oriental ways of life so as to be constantly attracted by Latin ways, often of the secondary, if not debased type" (p. 149). The author does really miss the most basic reason for the resistance towards the new "Orientalism" imposed by Rome and advo-

cated by Latin "orientalizers" like him: It is the same Rome that latinized as by force three centuries ago that is trying to "orientalize" us today in the same highhanded manner. The author says in his introduction: "I try to understand and appreciate the genuine Eastern Traditions neither as an outsider nor like latinized Orientals, but as Orientals themselves from within" (p. iii). What offends the Orientals most is what is implied in the claim. It means: You debased, latinized Syro-Malabarians, I know exactly what is good for you, and we are going to impose it on you whether you want it or not! Malabar church fought for three hundred years to get its freedom from Latin overlordship. Today it is facing a greater colonialism imposed by these Latin "orientalizers". The Portuguese latinization was superficial, addition of a few prayers, rubrics and feasts. Today the Latin orientalizers are latinizing our minds and attitudes introducing a thoroughly legalistic attitude towards liturgy and tradition. What they are imposing is a bookish orientalism concocted in Rome by scholars like Tisserant, Korolevsky, and A. Raes who gained their knowledge about Orientals purely from books. For the last seventy years our bishops fought this Latin orientalism imposed on us!

iii. The Roman Document: *The Order of the Holy Mass (Qurbana) of the Syro-Malabar Church 1981*, dated March 31, 1983

This document sent by the Vatican Congregation for the Oriental Churches is generally known in Rome to be the work of Fr. R. Taft S. J. of the Oriental Institute, a specialist in the Byzantine tradition. It shows the great helplessness of the Oriental Congregation in dealing with the Malabar liturgy since it had to seek the help of a Byzantine scholar, who had often publicly stated he knew nothing about the Malabar church or the Indian culture. By training and temperament a Byzantine is right the opposite of what the Syrian tradition stands for. In fact it was not on account of doctrinal differences but in opposition to the growing Byzantinization of the church that the East Syrians separated themselves from the main body of the church. Seeing the great many errors both factual and theoretical the document contains one can wonder how it could have been signed by the Prefect of the Sacred Oriental Congregation as its official document. Father Taft sees "latinization" everywhere! Mass facing the

people he calls latinization, even though every liturgist knows that it was not a Latin tradition but something adopted after Vatican II in view of the Banquet nature of the Eucharist. Giving a few moments for pause and reflection after readings, homily etc. he calls latinization, though it is something recently introduced in view of the importance of silence and meditation in prayer emphasized by Hinduism and Buddhism. Giving a short introduction regarding the spirit and meaning of the Divine Liturgy to prepare for the Mass the minds of people who generally have no sufficient religious disposition for it again is latinization for Fr. Taft. For him orientalism means retaining every traditional rubric and gesture however meaningless it be in the present day context. According to him the priest should begin with *Pukdankon* (your mandate) even though asking anybody's permission for the Divine Liturgy of our Lord makes no theological sense. Dismissing from the church all the catechumens before the formal beginning of the Liturgy ceased to have any real meaning from the 7th century. Still, Fr. Taft decrees that the dismissal should be retained if not in its negative form at least in an exclusivistic affirmative form though it is theologically objectionable and socially offensive. He indignantly asks why the 'bethgazza' or niches to prepare the gifts of bread and wine before their offertory were not provided in the Malabar churches within the last twenty five years! Why should they? Even the Ordo issued by Rome in 1959 had asked only for small tables. Fr. Taft does not seem to realize that the extraordinary solemnity attached to the taking of the gifts to the altar is simply a remnant of the old chaldean Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified. He calls it "proleptic symbolism", to which the Chaldeans in their literal approach to all texts were always very much opposed. Do we need such mystification today? Is it not better to emphasize that it is our own food and drink, our own gifts that are transformed into Christ's body and blood? It is the worst and most silly aspects and items of the Oriental tradition that these so called Roman Orientalists are trying to impose on us. As a result of the document Fr. Taft became overnight a 'specialist' in the Malabar tradition, and, to his own surprise, a real hero when Bishop A. D. Mattam officially visited him and thanked him for coming to the rescue of the Syro-Malabar tradition against all the "Indianizers"!

An artificial and legalistic approach to the Oriental identity of the Apostolic Church of St. Thomas and its liturgy will be only counterproductive. Sometimes people in their eagerness to prove a point go to absurd extremes and even paint themselves into heretical corners. A recent unsigned article "Individual Churches their Rights and Privileges", distributed by Bishop Joseph Powathil at the Syro-Malabar Bishops' Conference (July 19-20, 1983) seems to argue that each Rite is an individual tradition of divine Revelation, equal in normative value to the Gospel traditions, but intelligible only to those who identify themselves with the Rite. The author defines the post Apostolic Church as "subsisting as a heavenly communion of widely varying forms of faith and life claiming their origin to apostolic traditions". This is practically to deny the unity of faith in the Church! Rites contain not only material revealed by God but sometimes also errors, distortions and even heresies. We have to make a clear distinction between the Fathers of the Church as witnesses of the faith of the early Church and also as theologians, in which latter aspect they made some mistakes. How does one discern real revealed doctrine of faith from heresy except by the norm of the one faith of the Church, the *lex orandi* of the universal church?

The most outstanding distinctive character of the Malabar church and of the Syrian churches in general is their constant emphasis on the local Church: The local church for them is not simply a part of the universal church, but the one universal church itself. Any split or heresy in the local church rends the seamless garment of Christ. But unfortunately some of our Chaldean enthusiasts, even bishops, and Rome itself seem to be bent on destroying this basic note of our church: Some of our bishops, who as successors of the Apostles should know better, seem to be running like school children with their silly complaints to the big school master in the Oriental Congregation. And the officials of the Oriental Congregation who have little else to do, seem to be only too willing to treat our bishops like children. The golden principle of subsidiarity seems to be forgotten. A great service the Sacred Oriental Congregation can render to the Malabar church so rich in scholars of all types, theologians, Biblical scholars, and even lay specialists in all fields, is to ask our bishops to forget their petty differences and work together as Pastors for the good of the Church.

Dharmaram College,
Bangalore

John B. Chethimattam

Book Review

J. Kottukappally: *The Hope We Share, A New Christian Approach to Marxism*. Dialogue Series Publications, Barrackpore.

It was with the Second Vatican Council that Catholics officially opened doors for dialogue with Marxists. Thence onwards many attempts at christian-marxist dialogue have taken place in the different parts of the world, both on practical and theoretical levels. Fr. J. Kottukappally legitimately claims that his book is a serious contribution to this on-going dialogue in the theoretical or doctrinal level. And his aim in this dialogue is the cross fertilisation and mutual enrichment of both Christians and Marxists.

With this aim in view, the book opens with a short summary of the various attempts at Marxist-Christian dialogue, from Fr. Camilo Torres of Latin America to Fr. Vadakkan of Kerala in the practical field, from Vatican II to the Berlin Conference of the Communists in 1976 in the theoretical level. Kottukappally concludes this introduction by correctly noting that, as a whole, no serious attempt at dialogue between Christians and Marxists has been made in India. According to him, dialogue has nothing to lose and everything to gain since both Christianity and Marxism have affinity; he points out that biblical Christianity is a fourth source of Marxism apart from the other acknowledged three - German philosophy, French Socialism, and British Economy.

After establishing that dialogue is the need of the hour, the author delineates what he means by dialogue and to what kind of dialogue the book is going to be a contribution. He is happy only with the dialogue on the level of the ideals which both are striving for, because there is "a real and genuine unity between Christianity and Marxism as regards the ultimate ideal or cause...". It seems he is not happy with the dialogue that takes place between the theologians of liberation and the Marxists since the former tend to separate Marxist philosophy from its praxis, and reject the philosophy while accepting the 'tools'. I wonder what is wrong with this if the praxis can stand on its own legs without the help of a philosophy; unfortunately the book does not examine this problem. Since the dialogue is on the level of ideals, the differences and

divergences among Marxist groups and their methodology "need not preoccupy us as they do not directly and significantly affect the area of our concern, namely, fundamental philosophical problems and their implications for religions and Christianity".

The point of convergence, the ideal, according to the author, is Man. In spite of the differences in the nature and the goal of man as understood by Christianity and Marxism, it is Man the centre of concern for both. From the side of christianity, love of man is shown to be the central concern of the religion. Extensive references from the Bible and from Vatican II documents show how love of God and love of man are essentially related. The ministry of Jesus is presented as the ministry for the oppressed. From the Marxist point of view, their main concern is also to do away with all the structures that limit or oppress man's full growth to perfection. Of course this is only the ideal but Kottukappally wants dialogue on the level of ideals only. So here searching questions like whether actually the concern of both the Marxists and the Christians have been only for a section of the society, are not expected!

If the point of convergence for Christianity and Marxism is man, his social nature, alienation, struggle for success, hope for a future etc., the most fundamental area of divergence is God. But can there be convergence even in the centre of divergences? Kottukappally's standpoint is that, by recollecting and relearning we could find a few. He distinguishes the atheism of Buddha, Mahavira, Prometheus, Nietzsche and also of Marx who fail to find God in their anguish for the welfare of their fellowmen from the atheism of the hardhearted bourgeois by whom God is crowded out. Perhaps in the atheism of the former type we could hear the anguish of Jesus on the cross who cried: "O God, why have you forsaken me?" When it is said that the main point of divergence is God, it is, I think, only partially true. For the main point of divergence, perhaps, is man himself in whom the author finds the convergence. While it is very difficult from the Marxist point of view to establish the basic reason for the central concern for man (I suspect that historical materialism has not proved by the analysis of neither history nor matter that man can by nature be totally free and perfect), according to christianity it is in the love of man that the full and perfect love (God) is manifested in this world.

For christianity begins its concern for man from the reality of the incarnation, whose meaning is that God is in man.

The author also points out a number of other areas of divergence which, however, can enrich each other if properly re-collected and relearned. The Christians can relearn that the concern for fellowmen is to be manifested not merely in charitable acts but more importantly in their identification with the downtrodden, that the Kingdom of God is a reality of this world too, and that property is mainly for common use and its private ownership has only relative value. Similarly Marxists must relearn the limitations of their materialism, the necessity for a transcendent power, the unsatisfactory answer they have been giving to the problem of death and the changes which have taken place in religion which they had branded as the opium of the people. The Marxists must also find answers to such problems as why different stages of history have not followed one after another everywhere as they had envisioned, why there is delay in the final emergence of the classless society and why the spontaneous emergence of the higher phase of communism does not take place. The author correctly and clearly points out a number of paradoxes in Marxism—the expectation and failure of revolution in advanced capitalist countries, the ethical idealism of Marxist materialism, its possible roots in christian sources, Marxism's fascination for Darwinism and its rejection of social Darwinism, the permission it gives to use private consumer property while refusing to privately own productive property even though man is both individual and social in both cases, etc.

As regards morality, the weakness of both the Marxian and the Christian ethics is pointed out – the former due to the lack of a transcendent foundation and the latter due to its weakness in the active involvement for bringing about good in the world because of its excessive preoccupation with avoiding evil. When we speak about the lack of a transcendent foundation in Marxism it is good to remember that it is still an open question among philosophers whether one can build an ethical system without having recourse to God as its foundation or not. Paul Tillich says: "God ... is the name for that which concerns man ultimately". If that is so, is it not possible that there is an 'Ultimate Concern' behind

the ethical idealism of the Marxists? Is it because of this that Marxism is aptly but ironically called a 'religion'? Is it not the main weakness of Marxism that it purports to be a religion without an explicit religious foundation? These are the points which the book presents as most important and which any dialogue has to take into account.

Thus *The Hope We Share* is a remarkable work which paves the way for a fruitful and enriching dialogue. It is a rare contribution in India where such dialogue is also rare. Perhaps such books will encourage dialogue; let us hope so. I wish the book had also discussed the possibility of dialogue in a number of practical levels too, especially about the possibility of cooperation and collaboration in the struggle for a classless society whether or not it is supported by a materialistic world vision. I think, dialogue of this kind is also most urgent today. Of course this is not to deny the importance of the philosophical questions, but only to point out the need for further search for other areas of dialogue. The Appendix on 'Karl Marx the Man' is a very interesting and enlightening piece of literature especially in its argumentation with the anti-Marxist Gospel Crusader Richard Wumbrand who brands Marx as a 'Satanist'.

Jose Kuriedath